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OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 9.

✓ " ESSAY OF ACCOMMODATION" ✓

an earlier version than that
printed in Occasional Paper
No. 6.

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An earlier version of the "Essay of Accommodation"
than that printed in Occasional Paper No.6.

This Occasional Paper owes its existence to the discovery of another version of the "Essay of Accommodation", earlier than the version published in Occasional Paper, No.6. Its character was recognised by Mr. Ian G.Philip, Secretary of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, who noticed it among the papers of Philip, 4th Lord Wharton (Bodleian Library: Carte MSS. 81, ff.348-9) and very kindly not only brought it to my attention but assisted in the transcription and in settling doubtful points from the manuscript itself. (A second copy of the "Essay" in this version, with only minor differences of spelling and punctuation is among the same papers at ff.344-5.)

Date

The new version is clearly a forerunner of that already printed, and the adjacent papers in the bound volume of the Wharton Papers, being for the most part of the year 1678, suggest a like date for this, but as Mr. Philip

pointed out the manner in which the volume was put together in the eighteenth century does not allow of any very firm conclusion being drawn from that fact. The date of this as of the other version must remain for the time being uncertain.

Origin.

Perhaps more interesting than the date is the clear indication in the new version that the initiative in an attempt at accommodation at this time between the Presbyterians and Congregationals in London emanated from a group of laymen. The heading tells us that the "Essay for an accommodation betwixt the ministers of the Presbyterians and Congregational way" was "submitted to their judgments . . . by several in this city hearty wellwillers to them both."

Other Differences between the Two Versions.

Between the two versions there are many minor differences of wording, some of which suggest that the later version has been carefully revised throughout. But there are also a number of more substantial differences. In the text of the agreement itself there are indications that when it was considered by the ministers there were difficulties in adjusting differing views of ordination and of the place of ruling elders (III. 3 & 4; IV). It was decided that there was no need to come to a decision about ruling elders, but the differences over ordination were crucial and some sort of reconciliation had to be attempted, and, as the event showed, after agreement had been reached in 1691, it was on this point as much as anything that the agreement ultimately came to grief. Another striking difference is that while the

laymen hopefully recommended the drawing up of a unified confession of faith, the ministers cleverly sidestepped this fruitful cause of dissention by accepting any of several existing formulations (Section VI).

The Appendix.

The new version shows that what was added as an appendix, was, in the original, a general conclusion enforcing the whole, and that it differed in containing objections and answers which have been carefully cut out or summarized in the later version. The earlier version shows an interesting apprehensiveness about the possible reactions of the civil authorities. There are no indications that this older version of the agreement and conclusion had any influence, in wording or in substance, upon the ultimate Heads of Agreement, except through the later version. But it is curious that the same anxiety to do nothing that might antagonize the civil authorities reappears in the Heads, in Section VII, "Of our Domeanour towards the Civil Magistrate", to which there is no corresponding section in the "Essay". The last-minute alteration of "synods" into "occasional meetings of ministers" in the Heads of Agreement may reflect the same anxiety, which may also be discerned peeping out in the "Essay" in both versions of Section V. 3.

As with the version of the "Essay" printed in Occasional Paper No. 6, the spelling has been modernized or brought into line with that of the published Heads of Agreement.

I am grateful to the Bodleian Library for permission to reproduce this version of the "Essay" and especially to Mr. Ian G. Philip for bringing it to light and for his assistance.

January 1959.

Roger Thomas.

An Essay for an Accommodation betwixt the Minsters of the Presbyterians and Congregational Way submitted to their judgments and tendered to their consideration by several in this City hearty wellwillers to them both.

Ye the ministers of Christ having before our eyes the glory of God, the progress of the Gospel, the salvation of souls, the peace and edification of the churches of Christ; and calling to mind the sad effects of our former divisions, and the duty and work that not only the word of God, but his providence doth at this day aloud call us unto enter into this Christian brotherly, and so greatly desired union and agreement amongst ourselves, both in respect unto our principles and practice about the discipline and government of Jesus Christ and his churches, which we refer to these following heads, which if consented to.

First concerning the Church.

1. We agree that besides the mystical body of Christ which consisteth only of true saints, and those that shall be saved, and which in the most proper sense is the Church of God in the world there is a catholic visible church consisting of those that make profession of saving faith, of which notwithstanding many may not have saving faith, and never attain to salvation. . .
2. We agree that this catholic visible church doth consist of several particular churches walking together in distinct congregations and enjoying all the ordinances of Christ under the precedency and ministration of their several ministers and officers set over them in the Lord.
3. We agree that the members of these particular churches ought to be visible saints endued with a competent measure of saving knowledge, and sound in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Religion, without scandal in their lives, and holding forth a credible appearance in the judgment of Charity of true grace in their hearts.
4. We agree that these particular churches be constituted

by a mutual consent among themselves and the several members added thereto be by a credible profession of the true faith either explicit or implicit public or more private, as may be judged most convenient.

5. We agree that these particular churches thus constituted with their officers have authority from Jesus Christ of exercising spiritual power and jurisdiction among themselves, and enjoying the several ordinances of Christ, for their mutual edification.

6. We agree that these members of these particular churches ought as much as may be convenient to live or cohabit one by another for the better conveniency of their meetings together, knowledge and care one of another, though we dare not hold ourselves strictly obliged to parochial precincts and limits.

7. We agree that in the government of the churches, power of authority and jurisdiction belongs to the officers of it and to private members only power of brotherly advice and consent.

Secondly concerning communion of churches.

1. We agree that no particular church ought to live and walk so distinct and separate from other churches as not to take each one the care of another, but by mutual advice support encouragement and brotherly admonition as occasion may serve to strengthen the hearts and hands of each other in the ways of God, against common opposition and opposers.

2. We agree that particular churches are not subordinate to one another, but each endued with equality of power from Jesus Christ, and that they ought not to usurp the exercise of power and jurisdiction one over another.

3. We agree that the members of particular churches may and ought to have occasional church-communion with one another in the ordinances of the Gospel, as in reading and hearing the word, singing of psalms, breaking of bread prayers &c.

4. We agree that all visible professors as before described ought to be joined as members to some one particular congregation, and that ordinarily we shall admit none into this occasional communion, but such as belong to some particular church, which we judge to be not only orderly but necessary

(1) that they may be under the authoritative care and watch of some particular pastor and church (2) that in case of scandalous and offensive walking they may be authoritatively admonished and censured for their healing and recovery.

5. We agree not to admit any to be members of our respective congregations that are already members of another without the advice and consent of the churches they belong to.

Thirdly concerning the Ministry.

1. We agree that the ministry is a sacred office instituted by Jesus Christ for the gathering instructing and edifying the body of Christ, and is to continue till his coming again.

2. We agree that those that are in this office ought to be endued with the graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost, men sound in judgment, not novices in the faith and knowledge of the Gospel, men without scandal and of an holy conversation, and such as give up themselves to the work and service thereof.

3. We agree that they be ordained, unless in some special cases to some particular flock and in the place if it may be where their charge will most be, and that they be chosen and called to their office by the consent and suffrage of the church over which they are set, and that they be set apart thereunto by fasting and prayer and imposition of hands either of the elders of the same church (if any be) or some neighbouring church or churches or else by both.

4. We agree that in so weighty a matter as the choosing and calling a pastor no particular church is to proceed therein without approbation and advice from the elders of some neighbouring congregation.

5. We agree that the pastor being thus called and set apart he hath power given him of preaching the Gospel in any place where he hath opportunity and also to administer the seal of the new covenant to the members of any other church when desired and called by them thereunto, or to perform any other acts which are only (as they are called) actus ordinis: but as for acts of jurisdiction he can not exercise them but in the particular church over which he is set, he being actually enabled and empowered thereunto by that church's

call and voluntary submission of themselves to him in the Lord.

6. We agree that there is not one order of ministers superior to the others, but all are endued with equality of power derived to them from Jesus Christ.

Fourthly concerning Ruling Elders and Deacons.

We agree that these also are officers of the Church appointed by Jesus Christ and that the work of a ruling elder is to assist with the pastor in matters of church-rule and government and that of the deacons is to take care of the poor and to distribute the church's collections wisely and seasonably for their relief and both these officers are to be chosen and set apart to their respective office by the suffrage of the church, and imposition of hands.

Fifthly concerning Synods

1. We agree that synods are an ordinance of Christ for the resolving difficult questions for managing difficult affairs that may occur in the Church of God.

2. We agree that these synods be either stated or occasional and that for order sake one be chosen by the major part of the synod to be a moderator and to be chosen yearly or otherwise as shall be judged most convenient.

3. We agree that though we allow the civil magistrate to have power to convene and call synods together to give advice in matters of religious concerns, yet that the churches of Christ have power to appoint and constitute them by choosing and sending delegates from themselves respectively.

4. We agree that these synods be of lesser or larger extent according as the affairs of the Church of God may require and as providence gives opportunity thereunto: and that though the greater hath properly and formally * jurisdiction over the lesser, yet the lesser ought to have a very reverend respect and regard to the greater, and not without shewing some warranted and rational grounds dissent from their determinations.

* the word "no" has been omitted in the original through error.

5. We agree that to these synods may be appeals made by any particular Christian or church of Christians for relief in case of wrongs, for advice in case of difficulty and that the persons or churches appealing having received the judgment and determination of the synod ought to sit down and acquiesce therein.

6. We agree that such synods may take cognisance of any particular church that erreth in faith or walks disorderly and may demand an account of them concerning any opinions and practices among them, which give just cause of offence may advise and admonish them to relinquish such disorderly walking, and in case of obstinacy and refusing to hear the synod, they may declare against them; and if the nature of the crime doth require it, they may pronounce them a degenerate and apostate church, and with which the churches of Christ are to have no communion.

Sixthly concerning the Confession of Faith.

We agree that a formal system of the principles of the Christian religion be drawn up by our mutual consent, to which the several members of the respective churches are to declare their assent and that those that are baptised in their infancy shall not be admitted to a complete membership without a positive owning of the same and without being qualified as is before expressed in the third article concerning the Church.

Seventhly concerning our particular and more personal practices.

1. We agree upon the fore mentioned principles mutually assented and subscribed unto to own one another as true ministers of the Gospel, and to forbear all unbrotherly reflections one upon another, and to proceed with joint assistance and mutual encouragement in the work of Christ in the Gospel.

2. We agree to extend our care and endeavours as we have call and opportunity beyond our particular congregations to them that are yet unconverted to instruct and admonish them publicly and privately, that being fitted they may be received to the church and ordinances thereof.

3. We agree that in case of any of the aforesaid particulars our principles do not agree, which yet is much desired; yet notwithstanding we shall endeavour to go together in our practice, reserving the principles and grounds upon which we thus practise to ourselves, or, if they be declared, yet to bear with one another therein.

4. We agree not to look backward to what hath been spoken written preached or practised on one side or other, so as to continue or foment any division 'twixt us, nor to keep up names of distinction amongst us, but to look forward to the things that make for peace, increase, love and advance the progress of the blessed Gospel in these nations.

This is all only if touching the forementioned particulars of our agreement, anything may be thought fit to be added or altered, the better to serve this brotherly design by any brother whose subscription or consent is desired hereto, that then he may have liberty and he is desired to afford his help therein.

And for the enforcing this whole design.

1. It is humbly conceived that the principles of the Presbyterian and Congregational way rightly understood are not at that distance but may meet very near together, at least the assertors of them may walk together as brethren in a mutual communion with one another.

2. 'Tis probably judged that if the ministers of both ways were reconciled and agreed, the people would soon come to an agreement one with another.

3. This agreement is that which the generality of the godly and sober of the nation do much press and long for, and indeed the importunity of many of them herein is one great rise of this undertaking.

4. This agreement would much hinder the designs of men of corrupt minds who take advantage of our divisions to undermine all ministry, and to possess the people with a common prejudice against us all and to insinuate as if there ^{were} nothing certain in religion when their guides and leaders are so divided among themselves.

5. This agreement may probably be the present design and

expectation of God from us and 'tis to be judged by most that if we fail the Lord herein, who knows what further evils may arise and a hotter fire be kindled to melt us into one.

6. And doth not providence speak that now is the season for it, if at all, are we not brought down together into the valley? that we might meet and shake hands.

7. And if we had what liberties and opportunities we desire should we be able to improve them under our divisions to those advantages to the Gospel that otherwise we may do by our agreements, or should we not betray them and lose them again?

To conclude all though it may be feared that this design may not presently, at least take with all, some may have their scruples and others their interest to keep them back; yet we hope it will with men that are most serious, considerate, unbiased, and studious of peace, and if some begin others will follow, and the issue at last happy and comfortable to us all. But yet after all occurs a double objection. Objections. That such an agreement as things now stand can not be reduced into practice.

Ans. 1. However we may have this advantage to come somewhat nearer each other in principle, in satisfaction, and resolution to practise, when God may give opportunity.

Ans. 2. something may be done also in point of practice and we believe more than is yet done, however we shall have more peace in our doing to the utmost of what we have, for

Ans. 3. who knows but that when the Lord may see us in a posture prepared to improve further liberty he may graciously put it into our hands by giving us favour in the eyes of them that rule over us?

Objections. But the agreement may be looked upon with a jealous aspect from the civil magistrate.

Ans. We that enter into it are such as profess loyalty to the King, subjection to civil magistrates, and hearty desires to the real interest of the Nation.

Ans. 2. Let the agreement in all the parts of it speak for itself, there is nothing in it that can be construed to interfere with the civil power; only brethren declaring how

far their principles and practices in religion may meet together and if in any of the forementioned particulars or principles and confessions on either side serve to be extended beyond what hath been formerly professed; let it be remembered 'tis only brethren stretching out their arms to the utmost length to reach one another in an amiable union and accommodation, being earnestly desirous that those that agree in the fundamentals of doctrine and in the substantial parts also of worship and discipline may not by some lesser differences be kept at a distance from one another.

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